



STAR* Report

Buddy² STAR Research and Development Projects

STAR Writers: Grades 3-5 in three schools (2 rural, 1 city)

STAR Universal Writers: Grades 6-8 in two schools (2 rural)

The STAR Writing Projects' overarching goals are to:

- Increase student achievement in writing and related English / Language Arts skills as aligned with school and district goals.
- Increase student ownership of educational achievement and the entire learning process from goal setting through assessment of learning results.
- Extend time-on-task through well-planned use of home-based technologies in a strong homework culture.
- Increase parent involvement and participation in students' educational experiences.

In *STAR Universal Writers*, grades 6-8, the Project will also examine the use of web publishing as a mechanism for development, sharing and documentation of student writing progress.

CET Investment: Grants to Schools — \$ 763,000
(estimated to date) Management, Training, Facilitation for STAR activities (over 3 years) — \$ 880,000

School Partners: Fowler Elementary, Benton Community Schools
(selected via Benton Central Jr. High, Benton Community Schools
proposal) Mount Healthy Elementary, Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation
Rome City Middle School, East Noble School Corporation
Longfellow Elementary, Muncie Community Schools

Scope of Initiative:

2001-2002 3 schools, 22 teachers, grades 3 through 6, 400+ students and their families
2002-2003 5 schools, 32 teachers, grades 3 through 7, 600+ students and their families
2003-2004 5 schools, 36 teachers, grades 3 through 8, 650+ students and their families

The three schools selected to become our partners in the first year shared some common attributes:

- All have student writing achievement as a stated school improvement goal.
- All have not previously systematically implemented use of a writing process instructional model.
- Few, if any, teachers at these schools utilized data-driven decision-making to inform classroom instruction prior to this program implementation.
- Each school had some experience implementing Buddy "Computers at Home to Enhance Classroom Learning" projects prior to joining this endeavor.
- The three schools involved in the first year of implementation all represented a rural population with 30% to 40% participation in the Free/Reduced Lunch program.

In the second and third years of the program we have added two more schools:

- One is the rural junior high school (Gr. 7 & 8) to which students in one participating elementary school matriculate after grade 6.
- The other is an "urban" profile (officially classified as mid-size city) school with 90% participation in the school Free/Reduced Lunch program and a racial mix of 44% white, 46% black, 9% multi-racial population with little experience with formal writing instruction with or without technology.

2nd Year Results —Promising!

Much was accomplished in year one and two. In January 2001, months before local implementation, teachers were provided project orientation and quality teaching practice training, writing process and assessment instruction, and the teacher teams began planning strategies for a myriad of implementation challenges. From technology and Internet deployment in homes to developing a writing process curriculum and

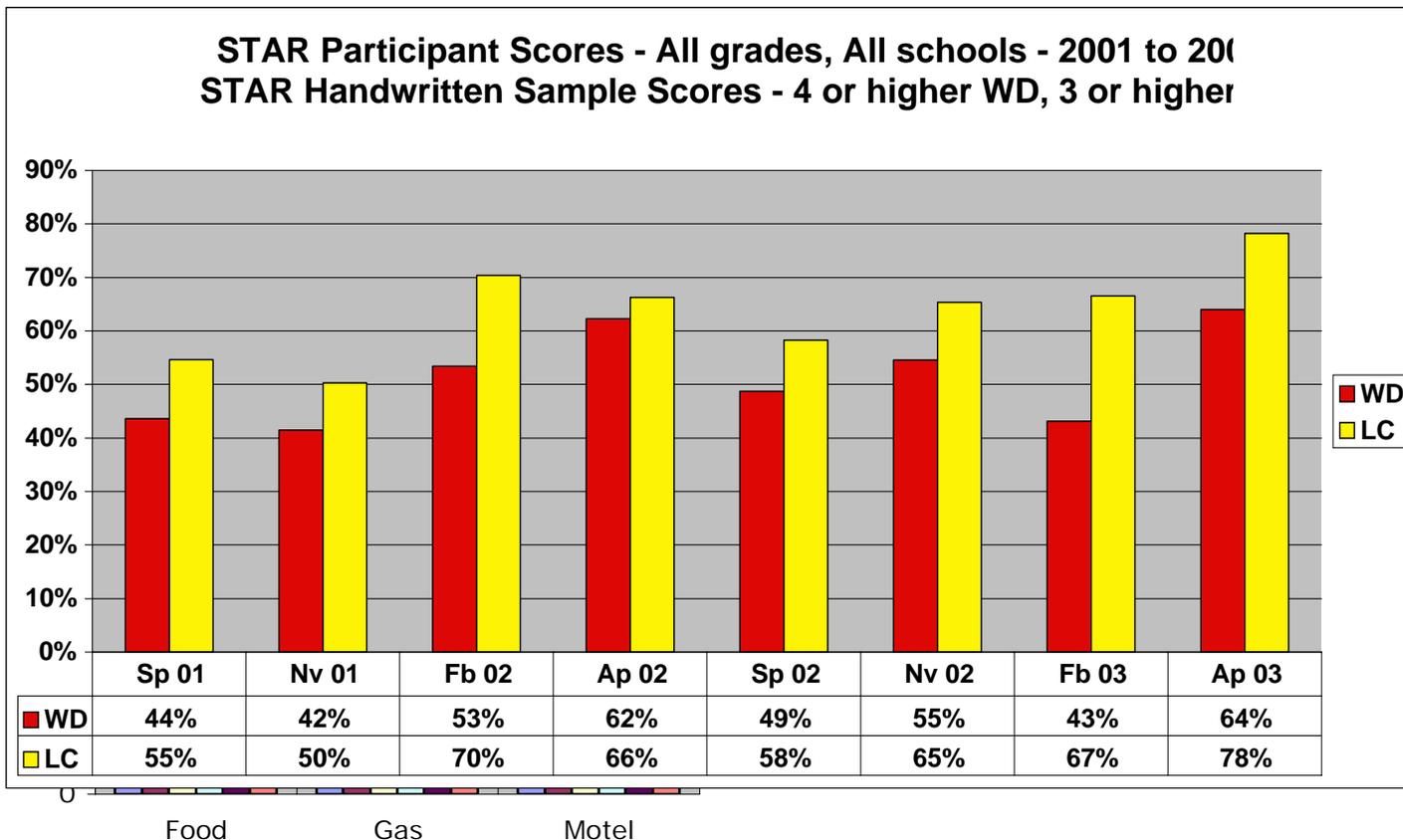
* Students Track Achievement Results

assessment strategies, the teachers ventured into instructional management areas never before addressed in their schools and classrooms. In the meantime, STAR facilitators developed data collection, management and analysis tools; gathered writing resources for teacher use; created STAR support materials; and prepared agendas for STAR family training events, as well as spent many hours in onsite support for project schools.

During the first and second years, teachers and students wrote a lot at school and home, tracked writing instruction and activity data, and submitted eight handwritten writing samples plus three computer-generated home writing samples. In Year one, many students and their families got “online” for the very first time and learned to receive and submit homework via email and attachments. Ongoing STAR family training events were attended by many families and teachers met on a regular basis for continuous grade level and project planning. On March 1, 2002 all project teachers met together for additional training in goal setting, data analysis, and writing activity development. On October 9 and 10, 2002, *Buddy* hosted a “Focus on Writing” conference at which STAR participants shared what they had learned in the first year of implementation with nearly 200 Indiana educators from across the state. The conference also featured state, regional and national authors and speakers on a variety of writing instruction topics. The conference received “rave reviews” by its participants.

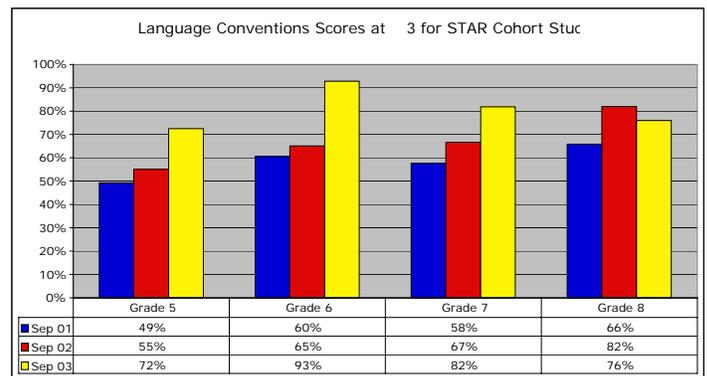
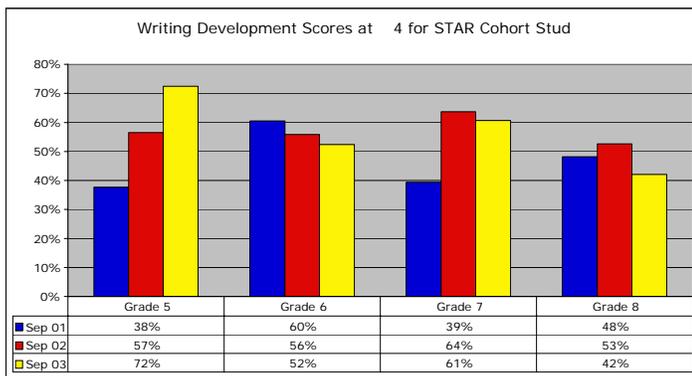
Continued progress in writing instruction and student scores were noted throughout year two. Schools tweaked and marketed family involvement to increase participation in family training activities. More teachers began using the web and email to provide, support, collect and assess writing. In grades 6-8, students used Criterion (an online writing feedback and assessment tool) to practice and submit home writing assignments. Teachers who used our tracking tool to help us collect data were more frequently using the tallied results of that data for reflective practice in writing instruction. Additional work toward student goal-setting and personal ownership of writing improvement goals was also noted in more classes than in the previous year.

The STAR facilitation team set a “mastery” cut score for “Writing Development” at 4 of 6 possible points and 3 of 4 possible points for “Language Conventions” scores. We use ISTEP-similar writing applications tests four times per year for formative evaluation of student gains. Student achievement results from the first two years show significant growth among the majority of students in writing development and the language conventions skills that support written work of all writing genres. Though the highest gains were shown by the cohort group of students (those who completed two full years of project involvement), total project participant gains over time were impressive. The chart below shows the percentage of scores for all 600 students participating in 02/03 at grades 3-7 that met or exceeded the mastery cut scores set by the project on each of the eight “ISTEP-like” samples.



Variations among “passing” rates for the samples shown in the previous chart can be explained in part by the variety of writing genres tested as well as the myriad factors that impact any student assessments such as testing environment conditions, timing, etc. In general however, overall gains from the first writing sample (Sept. 01) to the eighth sample (Apr. 03) showed an overall achievement gain of 20 percentage points in Writing Development and 23 percentage point gain in Language Development scores.

STAR students submitted their most recent writing sample in early September, 2003. An analysis of scores by grade level cohort groups (students who participated in the program since September 2001) was completed and shows mixed results. Grade 6 and grade 8 students have slipped a bit in their Writing Development scores, though students in grades 5 and grade 7 show significant growth over their two-year involvement in STAR. As noted in the chart below, group gains from September 2001 to September 2003 showed gains by grade as much as 34 percentage points (grade 5) and as little as a loss of 8 percentage points (grade 6) in Writing Development. Language Conventions scores, comparing September 2001 to September 2003 showed gains at all grade levels from a low margin of +10 points (grade 8), to a huge +33 point gain (grade 6).

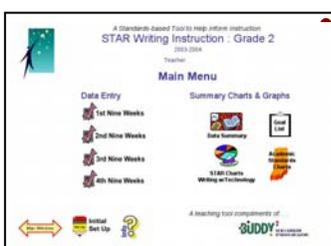


A review of the first two years of the STAR project by project participants and facilitators concluded that while significant progress had been made in writing instruction that resulted in student gains in writing achievement, we still have several project components that need additional attention. In 2003-2004 our project will strive to maintain the quality and focus of writing instruction and frequent writing assignments, but will alter strategies for design and delivery of family training in an attempt to increase overall participation from STAR families. Other areas in which we have had only limited success across the entire project is in the “student ownership” of writing goals and assessment as well as peer conferencing activities. Most teachers still report they lack confidence in their own ability to assess student writing against the ISTEP rubrics (particularly in Writing Development) and are unsure how to successfully teach their students the skills necessary for self- and peer-assessment. The project will also provide additional training, support and incentives for student technology use in writing during 2003-2004.

STAR Technology and Data Tools

Buddy believes that technology, at school and at home, can greatly enhance the teaching and learning process. In this STAR research & development initiative, we are employing several technology-based tools and strategies to move toward our goal of improved writing achievement.

- **Home-based technology and Internet Connectivity:** Each STAR family and teacher has a home computer and Internet access available to them for use in project activities. Grant funds from CET assisted schools in purchasing home-technology to loan to families in need. In a few cases where telephones are unavailable in homes, arrangements with local public libraries or other community centers provide Internet access for participating students.



STAR Teacher Instructional Checklist: A unique featured tool of this initiative is an Excel™-based utility for teachers to track STAR instructional activities, including what Indiana Academic Writing Standard skills are addressed throughout the program. Summaries and graphs are automatically generated by this point& click tool to help teachers review, reflect and plan for future instruction to meet weekly and unit instructional goals. STAR facilitators also capture this data to document local project efforts and to help identify resource and training needs of STAR teachers.

- **Student Online Checklist:** Students respond on a weekly basis to an online survey to capture information about their writing goals and activities. The results of these surveys are compiled monthly and shared with project teachers.
- **E-Lockers:** “The dog ate my disk!” is not a valid excuse for STAR students. Each student and teacher is provided a personal E-Locker, a web-based storage space, to post and retrieve documents while at school or home, or wherever there is web access. Classroom E-Lockers are used to collect writing assignments.
- **Criterion™ Online Writing Assessment:** New to the project in 2002-2003, is an online writing assessment service from ETS that allows students to get an instant score or critical review of their writing. Students may write to prompts provided at the site to be holistically scored according to posted rubrics or may submit writing for specific critique and suggestions for improvement in several critical skill areas. Teachers can set up and manage writing assignments, focusing on one or more traits of writing, annotating posted writing and keeping track of student writing drafts and final products. STAR teacher training for this product will be revisited in 2003/2004 to optimize its use as a teaching and learning tool.

Continual improvement is our project goal:

While we are pleased with results thus far, STAR has a long way to go to ensure academic success for all students and quality instructional success for all teachers. In the first year we focused on getting students and families equipped with technology and telecommunications, teachers equipped with writing process instructional skills, schools equipped with data capture tools and processes and the project equipped with baseline data for all participants. In the second year, we introduced some new technology and writing instruction techniques. In the third year we will continue to hone teacher skills, student ownership of learning as well as work to increase family involvement.

Sharing what we learn:

Our focus remains to support the schools and teachers engaged in this import research and development effort and toward that end we provide grants, onsite facilitation, training and opportunities for STAR participants to engage in meaningful dialog and sharing with others. Our budget and staff time is heavily weighted toward support of the few schools in this project. In addition, the CET Buddy mission holds the value of sharing for professional growth at its core. With STAR, this is not only expressed in day-to-day communication among project participants, but also by our staff sharing best practices and tools developed in STAR with other interested educators across the state through our *Buddy² Teaching and Learning Center* (BTLC) workshops and *Outreach* programs.

On November 4 and 5, 2003, Buddy sponsored a two-day conference event entitled *A Focus on Writing: K-8* that provided nearly 400 Indiana educators from over 100 Indiana schools with an excellent professional development experience. More than 50 writing instruction experts, authors, performers and teachers of state, regional and national repute shared advice, activity ideas and strategies to enhance writing instruction in today’s classrooms. Over \$100,000 in grants were issued to schools who identified writing as a school improvement goal so that they may send one to four representatives to this big Buddy event.

Looking for answers. . . and, perhaps, additional questions:

Over the three-year span of the project, we hope to learn that STAR intervention makes a positive difference in achievement for students engaged in the project for one-year, two-year or three-year terms. Our research is studying the impact of technology use, quality instructional practice, and parent involvement on student achievement in writing. While it is still too early to draw conclusions about any particular aspect, the early indicators of progress show promise. With perseverance of effort by all participants and staff that are in turn supported by adequate project funding we anticipate being able to show remarkable results by the close of 2004. As with most research and development initiatives, we also know that we will identify additional questions worthy of further study. Ongoing assistance from our third-party evaluation contractors will help us analyze this project’s results and design future Buddy investigations.